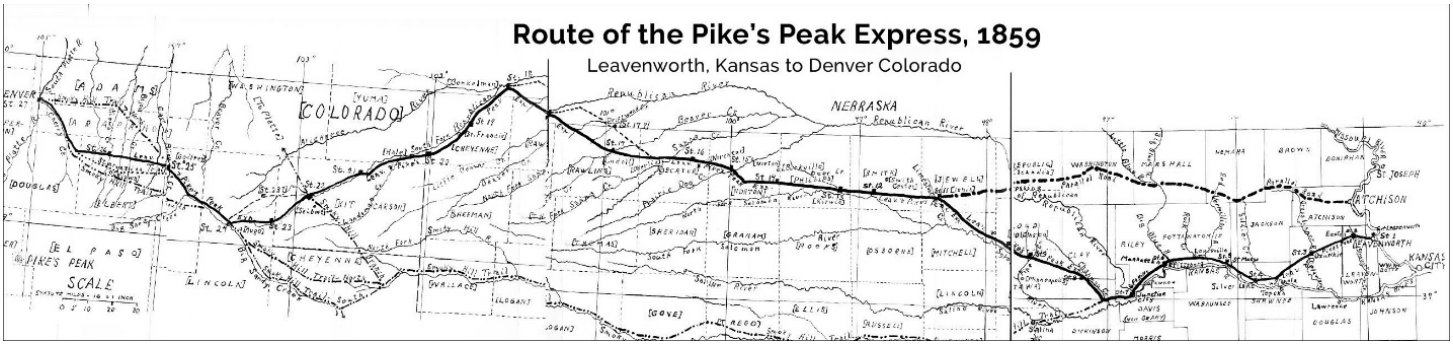

Before Cheyenne County was settled

by Penny Raile

Twenty-one years before the first post office in Cheyenne County was established in 1880, there were thousands of Pike's Peak gold seekers traveling through the county in a frenzy having packed up their belongings and headed towards Colorado. They were known as "Fifty-Niners" after 1859, the peak year of the rush and often used the motto *Pike's Peak or Bust!*

Many of them used the stagecoach line running through Cheyenne County, the Pike's Peak Express, that began in Leavenworth, Kansas and ran across northern Kansas and jetted up to Benkelman, Nebraska and then ran diagonally through Cheyenne County and on to Denver, Colorado. The route was 687 miles long.

Passengers paid $125 for a one-way journey with stops at 26 stations for food, lodging, new horses and fresh drivers. The stations were about 20-30 miles apart. The trip from Leavenworth to Denver took anywhere from 8-14 days and included overnight stops. The trip often included encounters with Indians, buffalo and meals of meat that were indistinguishable.

There were two stations in Cheyenne county (see map). Station 19 was located a few miles northeast of present-day St. Francis and Station 20 was in present-day Jaqua township. Both were on the banks of the Republican River. They were described in field notes by Horace Greeley and E.D. Boyd.

> Greeley wrote about Station 19*: A large Cheyenne village is encamped around Station 19, where we stopped last night; and we have been meeting squads of these and other tribes several times a day. The Kiowas are camped some eight miles from this spot. They all profess to be friendly, though the Cheyenne have twice stopped and delayed the express-wagons on pretense of claiming payment for injury done them in cutting wood, eating grass, scaring away game, etc. They would all like to beg, and many of them are deemed not disinclined to steal.* [1]
>
> Boyd's notes for Station 20 were sparse stating there was no timber other than a few cottonwoods and the creek was six feet deep with plenty of very good water.[2]

The stagecoach would return to Leavenworth again through Cheyenne County carrying passengers and often exaggerated accounts of gold that was found. The Pike's Peak gold rush was short lived but provided the first major European-American population in the region.

[1]*Overland Journey* Horace Greeley, written in 1859
[2]*Freedom's Champion* (Atchison, Kansas), E.D. Boyd, 1859
Map courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society, November, 1944 (Vol. 13 No. 4)